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ABSTRACT

One of three reports from Australia's Community Information Sharing Service (CISS), this evaluation discusses several aspects of a CISS study which was conducted to obtain a factual overview of community information services currently being provided by public libraries in New South Wales, and to develop guidelines for public library participation in community information services on the basis of that overview. Following a statement of the purposes of the study, three sections discuss (1) the questionnaire survey used in obtaining data for the overview of information services: (2) the interactive process used by CISS in helping library personnel deal with non-library information agencies, e.g., the use of informal information exchanges and special meetings: and (3) the methods for communicating guidelines developed by CISS, including workshops, consultant activities, and the publication of a report. Appendices provide sample workshop and information exchange agendas, library survey questionnaires, and diagrammatical representations of factors necessary to the successful provision of community information services through public libraries. (FM)

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COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

IN NEW SOUTH WALES

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Evaluation of a study

by

Eugenia Lovelace

CISS
(Community Information Sharing Service)
in association with
The Library Council of New South Wales

Sydney 1979

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on Community Information Services
in New South Wales Public Libraries.

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Enquiries regarding availability of the
report should be directed to:

CISS (Community Information Sharing Service)
c/- Contact person, Joy Burke,
State Library of New South Wales,
8th Level, CAGA Centre,
8-18, Bent Str.,
SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2000
(telephone: 240-4546)

PREFACE

The proposal for this study was formulated by a group of CISS (Community Information Sharing Service) members in 1977. Funding was sought and obtained from the Library Council of New South Wales and the study was undertaken between July 1978 and July 1979.

As well as ackowledging the initial debt owing to CISS members who formulated the proposal, and to the Library Council of New South Wales who funded the study, I also wish to thank the Steering Committee who were a constant source of information, ideas and support. In particular, the help of Carol Yuen, Information Services Consultant, Public Libraries Division, State Library of New South Wales, and Jo McIntyre, Assistant State Librarian, Information Services, State Library of New South Wales, was invaluable.

Without seeking to lessen the contribution of those whose help has already been acknowledged a major debt of gratitude is owed to the people who provided the information upon which the Study is based.

Finally, I would like to thank Frances Lovejoy, School of Sociology, University of New South Wales, for help with the statistical analyses of the data.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Introduction		1
Section 1	Background	3
Section 2	The questionnaire survey	6
Section 3	The inter-active process	7
Section 4	Communicating guidelines	9
Conclusion		10
Bibliography		12
Appendices		

Introduction

The proposal for the study, Guidelines for public library participation in community information was formulated by CISS (Community Information Sharing Service) and funded by the Library Council of New South Wales from 1977/1978 special grant funds for public libraries. The study was undertaken between July, 1978 and July, 1979.

The purposes of the investigation were firstly to obtain a factual over-view of community information services currently being provided by public libraries and secondly, on the basis of that over-view, to develop guidelines for public library participation in community information services.

The limitations, methods and findings of the study have been reported elsewhere. (1) The guidelines emanating from the study are the subject of another report. (2)

The purpose of this brief report is to attempt to evaluate certain aspects of the investigation in the hope that such a description may be of use to others interested in similar investigations.

During a major part of the study the Consultant was both observer and participator. This was not chosen as a research methodology but evolved from the nature of the area being investigated and the nature of the group who commissioned the investigation. The agencies concerned with information for the well-being of an individual as a member of a community were varied. That many appeared unsure of their objectives may have been because for many trying to explain those objectives in terms that other agencies could understand was a new experience. Further, as the role of each agency began to be seen within the context of other agencies, existing objectives sometimes began to be questioned. As well as uncertainty over what skills and training were appropriate there was also, at times, lack of awareness of the need for any special skills and training. In order to develop guidelines for public library participation in such activities it was necessary to gain an understanding of the attitudes, value-systems and skills of the various groups involved.

The Consultant was also a CISS member and was thus involved in activities undertaken by CISS in attempts to clarify such uncertainties and to influence attitudes. Thus a situation developed where the Consultant was actively engaged in attempts to alter the nature of what was being observed.

CISS activities often involved participating in information-related discussions, working-parties and projects. This method was also used during the study as an information-collecting technique. Its use reflected an implicit belief held by the Consultant and the Steering Committee, most of whom were CISS members, in the value of co-operative developments based on mutual understanding.

Granted the current interest in community information by many groups similar to CISS in their philosophies and activities the background to this part of the investigation is considered in some detail.

Section 1 Background

CISS formed as a result of an awareness among a number of community information workers that contacts among themselves tended to be restricted to their own organizationally structured networks, for example, librarians with librarians, community workers with community workers and so on. This resulted in poorly informed networks operating independently: sometimes duplicating unnecessarily each others positive efforts; sometimes heading off on fruitless side-tracks that could have been avoided had information about the experiences of other groups been readily available.

CISS hoped that by providing a forum for the exchange of information among community information workers from all the agencies involved that it could help to stimulate, enrich and facilitate the flow of information about community information regardless of the organizational or professional affiliations of the workers involved. Inherent in these activities was a belief in the value of information not only as a basis for informed participation, but also for both personal and professional development.

Over a period of some three years CISS members met once a month and shared information in an informal setting. Gradually an awareness developed in CISS that although informal information sharing was a valuable and rewarding activity it suffered certain limitations. Information so obtained was essentially piecemeal and the degree to which such information was effective in keeping members up-to-date depended on whether the network was sufficiently large to be able to keep in contact, albeit indirectly, with relevant developments. There was an unease that perhaps the informal network itself was not fully informed.

Another limitation of the informal information exchange was that, despite being evidently effective in enriching and stimulating the flow of information among the group, it was less evident whether it was also effective in sharing this information with a wider audience. The circulation of minutes of meetings through a large and varied mailing list was one attempt to share this information more widely. As well as members individually gaining valuable information there also developed a pool of attitudes, ideas and concerns generated by the inter-action of a group of people sufficiently at ease with their subject and their colleagues to be willing to think around ideas and accept or reject as evidence dictated. Again, however, there was a disquiet that perhaps this collective knowledge was not being shared as widely as was desired: the substance of this inter-action could not be disseminated through minutes.

Thus, in CISS at the time that the proposal for the study was formulated there were two underlying, not however always verbalized or uniformly shared, concerns. That CISS itself and others interested in community information needed to be better informed and that CISS

knowledge was perhaps not reaching information workers outside the active network.

Thus it was proposed to obtain a factual over-view that would add to the body of knowledge about community information services. And then to distill this knowledge into a tangible, useful form and finally to disseminate this as widely as possible.

Thus a proposal to do the following was made:

1. Collect and collate available data on public libraries currently offering or contributing to a community information service ... in order to present a factual over-view.

2. Analyse the data in order to identify the extent to which the following factors, among others, influence the success or otherwise of public library involvement in community information:

   i) Degree of co-operation and co-ordination with other agencies

   ii) Methods of collecting and updating information

   iii) Structure of classification and indexing system

   iv) Quality of publicity and promotion

   v) Measures of evaluation of service

3. On the basis of the knowledge obtained through 1 and 2 above, and with the assistance of the collective experience of CISS members develop guidelines for:

   i) Co-operation and co-ordination with other agencies

   ii) The collecting and up-dating of information

   iii) A 'best practice' classification and indexing system

   iv) Publicity and promotion

   v) Initiating, expanding and evaluating services

4. Communicate and promote these guidelines to public librarians and other community information workers by publications, workshops/seminars and other appropriate means, this communication and promotion to be done in conjunction with appropriate officers of the Public Libraries Division.

The proposal specified three activities. To collect data for a factual over-view; to inter-act with CISS members in the development of guidelines; and to communicate these guidelines. It was not specified, since implicitly assumed, that knowledge about the non-library sector's activities was essential in order to have a perspective against which to delineate the potential role of the public library. Again, it was not specified, but rather assumed, that CISS would continue to develop and maintain this knowledge.

Section 2 The questionnaire survey.

A questionnaire survey was the primary method chosen to obtain the data for a factual over-view. Questionnaires were sent to all central library services in New South Wales, and additional questionnaires were sent to be distributed, at the Chief Librarian's discretion, to those branch libraries to whom it would be relevant. The response rate of 100% from metropolitan central services and 91% from country central services can be unhesitatingly called successful. That the questionnaires were mailed from, and were to be returned to, the Public Libraries Division of the State Library of New South Wales was probably a significant factor contributing towards the high response rate.

Although some items in the questionnaire could not be regarded as totally successful the over-all level of both the number of responses to individual items and the quality of the information provided was satisfactory. The level both of response rate and response quality suggests that the initial assumption made, that librarians would be relatively familiar with thinking about their information seeking and information giving, was justified.

Granted the objective of obtaining a factual over-view the questionnaire survey was undoubtedly a successful technique. It revealed that providing a community information service was a minority activity in public libraries. This finding was not unexpected: it served, in fact, to confirm on the basis of systematically collected data a view held by CISS that public library-based community information services were in an uneven and embryonic state of development. It further added evidence to suggest that the CISS information network was in touch with major developments.

The over-view moreoever provided a benchmark against which future developments may be measured. An over-view of one area of library service, community information service, may also be useful for comparisons with other areas of library service, for example, reference service and migrant services. With modifications and amendments the same questionnaire format may well prove to be a useful method of obtaining comparable data.

However, viewed as a source of information upon which to develop guidelines the questionnaire survey was perhaps less fruitful. The questionnaire data validated the opinion of many well-informed individuals that there were a handful of systematic, active and known services. Given this it would probably have been less time-consuming, and more profitable, to have examined those services more systematically and in greater depth than was possible through the discussions and visits undertaken in the course of the study.

Thus, judgements of the value of the questionnaire survey and the resulting factual over-view will depend on judgements about the value of information for knowledge and information for immediate action. These purposes are not, of course, in conflict. However, when a choice has to be made, because of time-constraints, then such judgements can be a source of conflict.

//

Section 3 The inter-active process

As well as holding monthly informal, information exchanges CISS also held special meetings, formed into working parties and participated in information-related projects and discussions as issues were perceived and raised by the group. The aims of these activities were several but of particular importance was the attempt to foster understanding.

It was felt that any public library proposing to participate in the provision of community information would also have to be concerned with developing such understanding with other agencies regarding roles and activities. Thus, CISS activities were seen to mirror broadly what would be involved for any public library attempting to co-operate with other agencies, and particularly with non-library agencies. Thus these activities began to be pursued with more definite aims within the context of the study.

It was unclear at times whether these activities were being undertaken for the purposes of the study or were being undertaken as a CISS member to add to collective knowledge. As a CISS member the Consultant reported on the progress of the study at regular CISS meetings, Thus, input from the study was in turn influencing the nature of that collective knowledge.

Participating in information-related discussions and activities was fruitful in eliciting insights into attitudes and value-systems. The trust engendered through familiarity allowed frank discussions about various agencies' objectives and activities.

However, it was a method heavily dependent on the development of an informal personal network and it suffered from limitations common to such networks. The range and comprehensiveness of the information so gathered was limited by the range of contacts that could be personally developed by the Consultant and the Steering Committee. Although easy informality among the members allowed for open discussions and the sharing of sensitive information, the sharing of information outside the network was more restricted: sometimes by intent since spreading such information could be seen as a betrayal of personal trust.

The participatory method was also extremely time-consuming. As a participator that time was probably rewarded in terms of contributing to the spreading of information and of understanding. However, as an observer attempting to gain an over-view of the roles and activities of the groups involved it can be questioned. For example, requests to visit local groups planning to co-operate in implementing an information service could not be rejected on the basis that there had been sufficient contact with such activities and groups for the purposes of the study. Any such rejection would have made participation in other activities out of the question.

A further problem was that the process may well have been totally different had it been undertaken by another investigator. No doubt different activities with different groups would have been undertaken and different issues would have been considered significant. Although the Consultant was aware of holding certain values, such as a belief in the value of informed participation, no doubt there were other values that also influenced the way that the study was conducted but which were unrecognized.

A difficulty associated with the method was related to its being an attempt to be part of and observe a changing process. Not all aspects and threads could be observed simultaneously and decisions had to be made about what to watch and what to let pass. Thus, what later turned out to be red-herrings were sometimes followed and apparently unimportant events later assumed significance.

Section 4 Communicating Guidelines

Three methods for communicating guidelines were chosen: workshops; through the activities of the Information Services Consultant of the Public Libraries Division; and through the publication of a report.

Two workshops were held. The first workshop (See Appendix A) held in conjunction with the N.S.W. Branch of the Library Association of Australia and the Public Libraries Section, N.S.W. Group, was for public librarians and aimed to communicate and test draft guidelines. It proved useful in corroborating that the factors and activities that the study had identified as significant areas were also seen as significant areas by the librarians who attended. It was also useful in throwing doubt on the success of one attempt to represent, in a simplified graphic form, the complexities and inter-relationships of the factors involved. (See Appendix E) It further re-inforced the awareness that many practising librarians were more interested in "how-to-do" than in the reasons and provisos involved in why, and why not, to do.

The workshop provided valuable in-put for the study. Its value to the participants is less certain. An evaluation form, (See Appendix B), was distributed to all participants of which only 5 were returned. This poor response may have been due to the design of the form or to the fact that people were free to post it back later if they preferred. Further, that the workshop may have aroused either little opinion or negative opinion is another possibility.

The second workshop, held in conjunction with the Council of Social Service of New South Wales, aimed to communicate to the non-library sector the range of current co-operative ventures between public libraries and non-library agencies. (See Appendix C) Again, the workshop aimed to induce thinking about broad issues rather than give specific how-to-do advice. As with the first workshop, however, participants appeared to be more interested in the latter than in the former.

The evaluation form, (See Appendix D), was distributed and collected during the workshop and about half were completed. This better response may have been because the forms were collected on the day, or, may have reflected the usefulness of the workshop to the participants.

A problem common to both workshops was that the diversity of experiences in, and knowledge about, the provision of community information held by the participants made it virtually impossible to pitch the workshops at a level that would be relevant to most participants. This is probably inevitable when the topic is still an innovative activity. Further, many participants appeared to be seeking how-to-do advice. From the study it was evident that standardized guidelines for specific activities appropriate to all libraries

could not be developed since the type of service, and hence of activities, would vary from library to library depending on the inter-play of a number of factors that had to be considered in each case. For these two reasons it was decided that further workshops were inappropriate for the time being.

A more effective method of communicating the draft guidelines was through the activities carried out by the Information Services Consultant of the Public Libraries Division who was, fortunately for the purposes of the study, a member of the Steering Committee. A network of personal contacts had been developed and discussions about the guidelines were held, throughout the study, during visits to libraries. This personal consultancy approach was more effective in conveying information about a topic which is essentially complex. It also allowed discussions to be geared to both the level of experience of individual librarians and the particular environment of each library. The simplified graphic representation was found to be a useful tool when used in the context of a one-to-one discussion.

The publication in which the guidelines were finally presented was aimed at practising librarians throughout the State. It faced two quandaries. There was a desire that people should be informed about the basis upon which the guidelines had been developed, whilst at the same time not taking away from the essentially practical, action orientated purpose of the publication. A further quandary was that it was known that the potential user would be seeking specific how-to-do advice, whereas, the study had clearly shown that the specific activities involved would vary from library to library. Thus, an attempt was made to steer a middle course in both cases.

A brief outline of the study methods and findings was included in an introduction on the assumption that the full report on the methodology and the findings of the study might be too detailed for the interest of many of the potential users of the guidelines publication.

The line taken to resolve the second quandary took into account the activities of the Information Services Consultant. Thus, the guidelines were presented as broad guidelines on the assumption that that Consultant could give assistance in the more individual step-by-step activities. Further, the guidelines were seen within the context of CISS activities. The group could both provide advice and be a focus for feed-back: it was the hope, at the end of the study, that the group would be able to do some follow-up and evaluation of the utility of the guidelines.

Conclusion

The report on the guidelines as well as attempting to meet one of the objectives of the study was also trying to meet one of the initial CISS concerns for a practical, useful tool. To meet another concern of the study and of CISS, to add to the body of knowledge about community information services, another report detailing the

study findings was produced. This report, as well as hopefully being of interest to others concerned with similar investigations, is also an attempt to report back to CISS some of the insights gained by a few CISS members in the course of the study. It is not possible, at this stage, to evaluate any of these reports.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Lovelace, E. Community information services in New South Wales public libraries: an investigation. Sydney, CISS (Community Information Sharing Service) in association with the Library Council of New South Wales, 1979.

2. Lovelace, E. Community information services in New South Wales public libraries: guidelines. Sydney, CISS (Community Information Sharing Service) in association with the Library Council of New South Wales, 1979.

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY INFORMATION

- A WORKSHOP

CISS (Community Information Sharing Service),
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA, N.S.W. Branch
and
PUBLIC LIBRARIES SECTION, N.S.W. Group

TIME: 9 am - 5pm Saturday, April 28th, 1979

VENUE: Hut C, School of Librarianship, University of N.S.W., Anzac Parade, Kensington

PROGRAMME

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
9.00 - 9.15	Registration	
9.15 - 10.30	CISS Study	Jo McIntyre, Assistant State Librarian, State Library of N.S.W.
	Guidelines for public library participation in community information	Joy Burke, Liaison Librarian, State Library of N.S.W.
10.30 - 11.00	Morning tea	
11.00 - 12.00	Group discussion on the possibilities for public library participation in community information	
	Poster display	
12.30 - 2.00	Lunch	
2.00 - 3.30	Methods	
	Know your community - collecting information	Cheryl Montgomery, Community Information Librarian, City of Sydney Public Library
	Organising community information	Keith Davison, Systems Officer, State Library of N.S.W.
	Updating	Joan Begg, Manly-Warringah CAB
3.30 - 4.00	Afternoon tea	
4.00 - 5.00	Cooperation - a panel of representatives from various agencies involved in the community	

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY INFORMATION - AN EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIANS.

CISS (COMMUNITY INFORMATION SHARING SERVICE)

LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
N.S.W. Branch
Public Libraries Section. N.S.W. Group

April 28th, 1979
School of Librarianship
University of N.S.W.

It would be useful to us when planning future workshops to have your evaluation of this community information workshop.

Please ☑ tick the answer that best describes your response and sent it to

Carol Yuen
Information Services Consultant
Public Libraries Division
8th Level 8-18 Bent Street
SYDNEY 2000.

I) Guidelines for public library participation in community information.

This session was:-

a) of theoretical use only ☐
b) relevant to my library's practical needs ☐
c) of marginal use ☐

Could you plot the position of your library?

II) Group discussion on the possibilities for public library participation in community information.

This session was:-

a) of theoretical use only ☐
b) relevant to my library's practical needs ☐
c) of marginal use ☐

Comments

III) Methods.

i) Know your community

a) theoretical use only ☐
b) relevant to my library's practical needs ☐
c) of marginal use ☐

Comments

ii) Organising community information

a) theoretical use only ☐

b) relevant to my library's practical needs ☐

c) of marginal use ☐

Comments

iii) Updating

a) theoretical use only ☐

b) relevant to my library's needs ☐

c) of marginal use ☐

Comments

IV) Cooperation - a panel from various agencies working in the community.

Comments

Name (optional)

Thank you

C. YUEN

APPENDIX C

CISS/NCOSS INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Time: Saturday 26th May, 1979
10.00 a.m. - 4.30 p.m.

Place: Council of Social Service of New South Wales,
Mansion House,
180 Elizabeth Street,
Sydney.

Programme

10.00 - 10.15	Registration and Coffee	
10.15 - 10.30	Welcome and introduction. Ald. B. Dougherty, President, Local Government Association.	
10.30 - 11.00	CISS - Carol Yuen. Public Libraries Division, State Library.	
	Questions	
WADING IN	Chair: Joy Burke	
11.00 - 11.30	Marrickville Municipal Library	Dimitri Symeonides
11.30 - 12.00	Ryde Municipal Library	Christine Pauling
12.00 - 12.30	Wade Shire Public Library	Helen Brayne
	Questions and comments to speakers.	
12.45 - 1.45	LUNCH at NCOSS	
SAILING TOGETHER	Chair: Jane Dearer	
1.45 - 2.15	City of Sydney Public Library	Cheryl Montgomery
2.15 - 2.40	Richmond-Tweed Regional Library	Di Manson
2.40 - 3.00	Kogarah Municipal Library	Eugenie Wilson
	Questions and comments to speakers.	
TESTING THE WATER	Chair: Hope Clayton	
3.30 - 3.55	Lake Macquarie Municipal Library	Laurie Neilson
3.55 - 4.15	Coffs Harbour	Lorraine Vass
	Questions and comments to speakers.	
4.30	Close - Hope Clayton	
	Coffee	

APPENDIX D

CISS/COSS INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Evaluation

Organisational expertise

i) Some public libraries already collect community information. Sharing in the collecting of this information is ...

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but...

ii) Some public libraries have special skills in organising information. Making use of these skills is ...

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but...

iii) Some public libraries and community information centres have tried to help each other to update information.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but..

Identification of needs

Public libraries attempt to identify and anticipate information needs and levels of interest in the community. This information could be shared with Community Information Centres.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but...

New activities in public libraries

i) Increasingly public libraries are taking their services and activities outside the library through their bookmobiles and media vans. This 'face to face' contact with the community is an experience we could perhaps share and talk about.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but...

ii) Some public libraries have language specialists and information in different languages.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but.

The public library as a contact point in the community

i) Some public libraries act as switching boards for activities i.e., putting people and agencies in contact with other agencies and resources.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but. .

---

ii) Some public libraries act as a liaison between the community and the "Establishment" e.g., local government, the library network at State and National levels.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but. . .

---

iii) Some public librarians attend interagency meetings.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but. .

The public library as partner

i) Some public libraries and community information centres in the same area have the same community information files.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but.

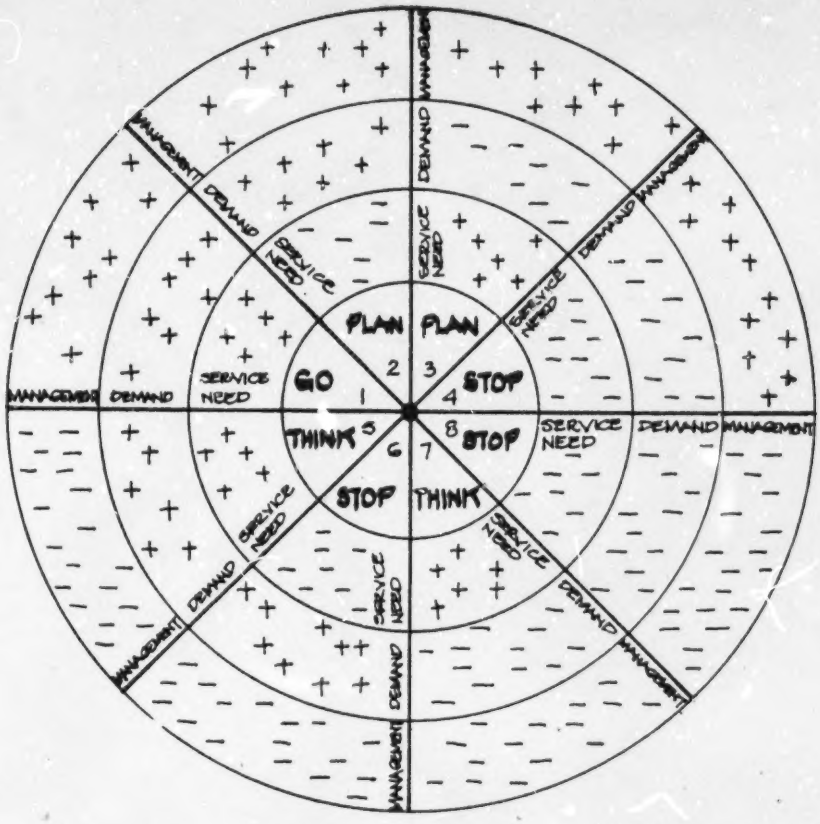
---

ii) Some public libraries are "freeing up" staff to work with community information workers.

. an idea I will pursue with my local library ☐ No ☐ Yes

. a potentially interesting idea ☐ No ☐ Yes, but

APPENDIX E



LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT ≡ MANAGEMENT which may be RESPONSIVE + or UNRESPONSIVE −

USER ENVIRONMENT ≡ DEMAND there may be a lot of DEMAND for C.I.+ or no visible DEMAND −

C.I. SERVICE ENVIRONMENT ≡ SERVICE NEED there may be no existing services therefore SERVICE NEED + or appropiate services may exist therefore SERVICE NEED −

ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES
FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTICIPATION
IN COMMUNITY INFORMATION

CISS
(COMMUNITY INFORMATION
SHARING SERVICE)
1979

FACTORS YOU CAN'T IGNORE

Community Information - by this we mean information for the well being of an individual as a member of the community. So the resources and characteristics of the community are your subject area.

The initial decision as to whether you want to get involved is yours, however, before you take the appropriate action you have to consider the following questions:

- Do you think your library management and staff will feel as enthusiastic as you do?
- Who are your potential users?
- What other information services are there in the community?

To answer these questions, consider the following factors remembering they are pervasive, constantly interweaving and constantly changing.

1. THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT
   The quality of staff, financial and physical resources and the attitudes and skills of staff and management to back-up the provision of a community information service.
2. THE USER ENVIRONMENT
   The extent to which people in your area are expressing a need for information about services, activities, programmes and resources in the community.
3. THE COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICE ENVIRONMENT
   The extent to which community information is accessible to individuals in your area. Some estimate of this can be gained by finding out the number and quality of information services in the area.

This is a diagrammatical representation of the above factors. Can you plot the position of your library?